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Indian and Northern Affairs, Canada (October 5, 1978)

Mr. W. J. Taylor

October 5, 1978

A. Macdonald

Northern Development Branch

Ottawa

Ottawa

Nutritional problems among the Inuit

The possible existence of a nutritional deficiency in the diet of the Inuit people has been raised on a number of occasions in recent years. At least one inter-departmental committee, chaired by the Department of Health, has been established to study the problem. It is currently a subcommittee of the

**NUTRITIONAL PROBLEMS AMONG THE INUIT**

of the ... with which the ... in the price of this product in the North.

The committee has been circulating a proposal to examine the availability of essential food items in northern communities and the Department has been asked for an official statement on:

1. whether such a project should be undertaken, and
2. if the project gets underway, whether this department will co-ordinate it.

Mr. Taylor attended the September 1st meeting of the committee and a copy of the minutes of the discussion is filed in the attached file. Mr. Taylor and I attended a follow-up meeting on September 1st with the chairman (Mr. Higin, A. Director, Policy and Program) who asked for a response to his questions by October 5th.

by Robert W. Reid

I have now reviewed the attached file which indicates a continuing interest in nutritional problems on the part of a number of divisions within the Northern Program but which also suggests the lack of some coherent action in the Program's response. The proposal for a new comprehensive examination of the entire problem seems to have flourished as the jurisdiction of both senior management and the Inuit Division of Canada Affairs is clear.

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Mr. M.P. Klein, /  
A/Director,  
Northern Economic Planning Branch.

OTTAWA, Ontario K1A 0H4  
October 5, 1978.

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Nutritional problems among the Inuit

The possible existence of a nutritional deficiency in the diet of the Inuit people has been raised on a number of occasions in recent years. At least one inter-departmental committee, chaired by the Department of Agriculture, has gotten into the picture, apparently as a consequence of the end of a subsidy to producers of powdered skim milk which has caused an increase in the price of this product in the North.

The committee has been circulating a proposal to examine the availability of nutritional food items in northern settlements and our Department has been asked for an official statement on:

1. whether such a project should be undertaken, and
2. if the project gets underway, whether this Department will co-ordinate it.

-- Ms. Dubose attended the September 1st meeting of the committee and a copy of her memorandum on the discussion is flagged in the attached file (Item A). Mr. Stewart and I attended a follow-up meeting on September 15th during which the chairman (Mr. Migie, A/Director, Policy and Program Group, Agriculture) again asked for a response to his enquiries. A third meeting is to be held in mid-October.

-- I have had prepared the attached file which indicates a continuous interest on nutritional problems on the part of a number of divisions within the Northern Program but which also suggests the lack of some coherent thrust in the Program's response. The proposal for a comprehensive examination of the entire problem seems to have floundered on the objections of both senior management and the Inuit Tapirisat of Canada (Items B and C).

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The Data Management Division has had on its roster a project which has some bearing on the subject. This is the proposal for a special family expenditure (FAMEX) survey within the North, the information from which would be used to develop "cost-of-living" indices for the two northern territories. (The project for the NWT's was approved by the Federal-Territorial Economic Planning Committee in 1975). Though Statistics Canada's survey people prepared for us a feasibility study for the project, that agency's prices people advised that a northern FAMEX would be excessively costly relative to the information to be secured. It was suggested that small settlement studies would be a more appropriate vehicle, particularly studies geared towards the native component of the population.

A small scale survey involving at least two settlements would fit in quite nicely with the broader concern for nutritional standards. We would envisage one settlement being predominately native in composition and the other being ethnically mixed so that we could determine what effect the presence of "whites" and their associated services have on the expenditure patterns of the native people. (Ideally it would be preferable to select two such settlements in each region of the NWT's but funds are just not available). Officials of the territorial government have told us informally that they would welcome the opportunity to participate in such a study. This preliminary project, moreover, if successful, could provide an opening to resurrecting the larger study on "Adequate Nutrition at Reasonable Cost for Northern Residents" which the Economic Analysis Division developed in the fall of 1977.

My recommendation, therefore, is that we tell the committee that this Department does not want to commit itself at this time to any comprehension study of northern nutritional problems pending completion of a small scale family expenditure survey which, for the first time, would give us some quantitative information of an objective kind on the extent of the nutritional problem. We should have senior management approval for this approach.

Would you return the file when you are finished with it?

Robert W. Reid

Robert W. Reid,  
A/Chief,  
Data Management Division.

Atts.

c.c. H. Wirth

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